

REMARKS

Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough consideration given the present application. Claims 1-20 are currently being prosecuted. The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider his rejections in view of the Amendments and Remarks as set forth hereinbelow.

ALLOWABLE SUBJECT MATTER

It is gratefully acknowledged that the Examiner considers the subject matter of claims 1-20 as being allowable.

CLAIM FOR PRIORITY

It is gratefully acknowledged that the Examiner has recognized the Applicants' claim for foreign priority. In view of the fact that the Applicants' claim for foreign priority has been perfected, no additional action is required from the Applicants at this time.

DRAWINGS

The Examiner has objected to Fig. 3 as not including the appropriate hatching. Attached hereto is a Replacement Sheet for Fig. 3 that includes the appropriate hatching. The Examiner's objection has been obviated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The Examiner has acknowledged the Information Disclosure Statement filed on January 23, 2004. An initialed copy of the PTO-1449 has been received from the Examiner. No further action is necessary at this time.

NO PROSECUTION HISTORY ESTOPPEL

Claims 1-20 have not been amended. No prosecution history estoppel would apply to the interpretation of the limitations set forth in claims 1-20 in view of the fact that this subject matter has been continuously presented since the original filing date of the present application.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above remarks, it is believed that the claims clearly distinguish over the patents relied on by the Examiner, either alone or in combination.

Since the remaining patents cited by the Examiner have not been utilized to reject the claims, but to merely show the state of the art, no comment need be made with respect thereto.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, reconsideration of the rejections and allowance of all of the claims are respectfully requested.

All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicants therefore respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider all presently outstanding rejections and that they be withdrawn. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and as such, the present application is in condition for allowance.

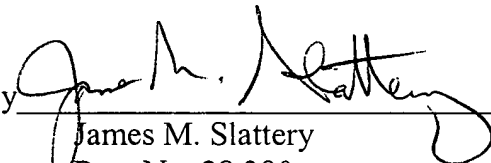
If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at (703) 205-8000 in the Washington, D.C. area.

A prompt and favorable consideration of this Amendment is respectfully requested.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

BIRCH, STEWART, KOLASCH & BIRCH, LLP

By 
James M. Slattery
Reg. No. 28,380

JMS/mmi

P.O. Box 747
Falls Church, VA 22040-0747
(703) 205-8000

AMENDMENTS TO THE DRAWINGS

Please replace Fig. 3 with a corrected version of Fig. 3 that includes the appropriate hatching as attached hereto.